FATIGUE AND DISGUST:
The Addenda to *Watt*

The 37 Addenda to *Watt* represent, according to Beckett, precious and illuminating material, and only fatigue and disgust prevented their incorporation into the text. More prosaically, most of them represent material considered by Beckett at some point in the genesis of *Watt*, but partially deleted; and their partial presence is a problem. There have been two significant studies of the Addenda, neither fully satisfactory. J. M. Coetzee’s 1969 Ph.D. dissertation offers a stylistic analysis of Beckett’s revisions, and is particularly valuable for its exact description of the manuscripts and details of composition, but his treatment of the Addenda is incidental; while Rubin Rabinovitz’s “The Addenda to *Watt*” (1984), though excellent in its elucidation of obscure literary and philosophical references, takes no account of manuscript evidence. This study will recognise the best of both its predecessors, yet insist on a theme that neither explores: Beckett’s deliberate use of the Addenda to evoke echoes of *Watt*’s past and the stages of its composition.

For *Watt* is not a New Critical well-wrought urn. More simply, *Watt* is not a pot. It is not. It is full of holes — gaps and hiatuses, lacunae, deliberate errors and contradictions. As Doherty has said, such puzzles are meant to make the reader “less and less secure in any kind of certainty... about the novel.” So, a teaser presents itself: in an age in which postmodernism is rampant, with a text so deliberately violated, how can an approach to the purpose via discarded drafts restore integrity? The inclusion of the Addenda within *Watt* precludes any possibility of a finished or determinate quality to the novel as text, and the Addenda themselves offer a challenge to the reader analogous to that faced by Watt as he confronts the mystery of Mr. Knott. That is, they invite us as readers and critics (that term of abuse in *Waiting for Godot*) to partake in the ancient labours of witness and exegesis, knowing that (like Watt) when we apply our scholarly blowlamps to open up the text we may find it empty. I see no way around the problem, save to acknowledge the critical urge — the rational spirit, Beckett calls it in *Murphy*, the need to scratch the spot that itches — towards interpretation, to try (like Watt) to get to the bottom of the mystery.

The Addenda, in relation to the text called *Watt*, thus constitute an enigma of the deepest kind: they are the fossil records that bear witness to earlier states of creation, and which, like all the records of the rocks, pose insoluble problems for creationists. Perhaps, the more that is learned of accidentals, the more substantial the mystery that remains?
Or, to vary the adage, can the ring about the bath-tub be a sign of significant absence? In a spirit of scepticism, then, I present my findings.

Although the 37 Addenda may be divided into many categories,⁵ I propose to deal with them in the order of the final text, treating each as a separate entry but trying to sustain an ongoing argument. Most of the information derives from the Beckett materials in the Harry Ransom Humanities Center at the University of Texas at Austin, as catalogued by Carlton Lake.⁶ I use his 157 to refer to the six magnificent notebooks that constitute the autograph manuscript of Watt, and 158 for the original typescript. References to “Coetzee” and “Rabinovitz” are to the dissertation and chapter cited earlier; and those to the “Murphy Notebook” are to the eclectic and mostly unnumbered pages of a large notebook (MS 3000) held in the Samuel Beckett Archive at Reading University.

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#1. *her married life one long drawsheet*: “Leda, née Swan, demi-mondaine, of Enniskillen”; mother of James Quin (the original of Mr. Knott), and wife to Alexander; a faded and dejected woman, who passes away after the death of her fourth Willy, her last-born (who died of sausage-poisoning), “half-heartedly pressing a crucifix of bog-oak to what was left of her bosom, in the bed in which etc., etc., her married life appearing to her in retrospect as one long drawnout drawsheet, to the great regret of all who had known her.” (157, 1.51 & 158, 41). A drawsheet, e.g., that of a natal bed, is a sheet that can be drawn without disturbing the patient; of Mrs. Quin’s eleven children (Willy, Willy, little Leda, Willy, Agnes, Lawrence, Prisca, Zoe, Perpetua, Willy) James is the sole survivor.

#2. *Art Conn O’Connery*: the literary forbear of Art and Con; painter of the “Second picture in Erskine’s room” (see #26), that of Mr. Alexander Quin (in early drafts the picture was in Quin’s dining room). His premature death at the age of 81 either from heart-failure brought on by the downfall of Parnell or of a surfeit of corned beef and cabbage was a loss to Rathgar (157, 2.7 & 158, 91-93). While “black velvet” denotes a standard back-drop to a portrait, it is also a mixture of stout and champagne (Rabinovitz 156). Rabinovitz also notes that George Chinnery (d. 1852) resided in Dublin during the 18th century and painted portraits and landscapes, while John Joseph Slattery was a portraitist active in Dublin between 1846 and 1858.